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Viewing cable 04NASSAU364, ANXIOUS PRIME MINISTER REQUESTS MEETING ON HAITI

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
04NASSAU364	2004-02-23 21:20	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Nassau

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.haiti-liberte.com/archives/volume5-1/Campagne%20des%20E.U..asp>
<http://www.haiti-liberte.com/archives/volume5-2/WikiLeaked%20Cables%20Reveal%20Obsessive.asp>
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This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 NASSAU 000364

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/22/2014

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [SMIG](#) [BF](#) [HA](#)

SUBJECT: ANXIOUS PRIME MINISTER REQUESTS MEETING ON HAITI

REF: A) NASSAU 211 B) NASSAU 212 C) NASSAU 263 D)
NASSAU 322

Classified By: CHARGE ROBERT M. WITAJEWSKI FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

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Summary
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1 (C) At a special luncheon function to honor Junior Achievement on February 19, Prime Minister Christie twice came to the Charge's table to request an "urgent" meeting the morning of February 20, later set for 12:30 in the PM's office. As events in Haiti continue to deteriorate, the sense of vulnerability by the Government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas (GCOB) at being overwhelmed by mass Haitian migration continues to grow. In this light, both the PM and Foreign Minister Fred Mitchell have exerted considerable time and energy in recent weeks to mediate peace talks between President Aristide and the opposition (reported reflets A, B and C). Increasing deterioration in conditions in Haiti are also reinforcing the Bahamian Government's sense of dependence on the United States in the event uncontrolled Haitian migrant outflows occur. At the 60 minute meeting on February 20 in his private office, PM Christie updated Charge on recent developments on Haiti from his Government's perspective.
END SUMMARY

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FOREIGN MINISTER BRIEFS THE UN
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2. (C) Christie initiated the discussion with a report on Foreign Minister Mitchell's just-concluded presentation at

the United Nations General Assembly that morning. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs later faxed the Embassy a copy of Mitchell's speech, which focused on the CARICOM proposal, including a constitutional role for a Prime Minister, rules governing protests and demonstrations by the opposition, the professionalization of the Haitian National Police, and additional security and economic support. FM Mitchell also called for the international community to "provide immediate security assistance to bring stability to Haiti, including helping the legitimate authority of Haiti to restore law and order and disarm the elements that now seek to violently overthrow the government, and who have interrupted humanitarian assistance." Mitchell continued using -- for him -- unusually strong language: "Those armed gangs who seek now to overthrow the constitutional order should be urged to lay down their arms and if not they should be disarmed."

13. (C) Christie related to Charge that in New York Mitchell had sought out and obtained additional support, particularly from Central and South American countries, for the CARICOM approach. Christie was particularly proud that Bahamian efforts had resulted in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Argentina agreeing to send police or military to Haiti as he observed, wryly, that these three countries did not normally agree with the U.S. of late. Christie also announced that FM Mitchell and Assistant Secretary Roger Noriega would fly to Haiti Saturday to continue to work all sides of the issue. Christie spoke authoritatively about conversations between FM Mitchell and A/S. Noriega and between Mitchell and NSC Western Hemisphere Director Tom Shannon. He also indicated that he had been in contact with members of the U.S. Congressional Black Caucus to allay their "deep concerns" about the "good faith" of the U.S. and others in seeking a resolution to Haiti's crisis.

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A RELUCTANT ROLE IN HAITI FOR MITCHELL?
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14. (C) The Prime Minister described his week of frantic conference calls on the Haitian crisis and a U.S. preference for the Bahamian Foreign Minister to play a new, and significant on-going role in Haiti as the third member in a tripartite committee that, Christie seemed to believe would effectively serve as a kind of "Council of Wise Men" in governing the country. Christie said that as he understood current plans, the council would be composed of three members: a representative from the Haitian Opposition, an independent Haitian Prime Minister, and Bahamian FM Mitchell representing Caricom and others. According to the Prime Minister, however, President Aristide had expressed reservations about the constitutionality of formally creating such a body. However, Christie continued, he believed from his conversations with him that President Aristide would accept an arrangement in which the same group would "informally" advise him on matters.

15. (C) Continuing his exposition, Christie then went on to say that his preferred solution would be for the United States or the French to assume the leadership of this body and supply the "third member" rather than The Bahamas.

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PRIME MINISTER WORKS THE PHONES IN NASSAU -- DEFERS TO U.S.
AS "TOP DOG"
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16. (C) The Bahamian Prime Minister appeared comfortable in his newly-assumed role of international mediator. He noted that he had spoken "at least a dozen times" with Haitian President Aristide of late, and this week alone reported that he had spoken with the Haitian President at least once each day. Explaining his frequent telephone conversations, PM Christie declared that, given the urgency of the situation, he did not want to risk having his message diluted or distorted "by leaving (the resolution of the crisis) to ambassadors."

17. (C) Noting that President Aristide had claimed that "bandits" were responsible for attacking the Opposition, not government forces, PM Christie said that each time he spoke with Aristide he had stressed the importance of Aristide appealing directly to the U.S., France, or Canada for assistance in re-equipping Haitian police so that law and order could be restored. Christie indicated some sympathy for Aristide's claimed plight, telling Charge that "there is simply no way that a demoralized police force of less than 5,000 can maintain law in order in a country of more than 7 million." Christie seemed hopeful that the U.S. would reconsider its position against supplying the Haitian police with lethal weapons, and at a minimum do more to support the Haitian police with non-lethal support.

18. (C) Christie indicated his preference for continued

direct high-level involvement in Haiti. He felt that it was important that he and others at the head of state level continue to involve themselves in the situation and interact directly with Aristide in order to reinforce the urgency of the situation. Christie said that it had been his idea to contact South African President Thabo Mbeki to try to involve him in Haiti. It would be appropriate, he said, for the world's "newest black nation" to help the world's "oldest black nation." At regular intervals during the one-hour meeting, Christie reiterated the pleas for assistance to restore law and order in Haiti made by himself and others to Secretary Powell, President Bush, Secretary General Annan, and the O.A.S.

SYMPATHIZES WITH ARISTIDE'S CONCERNS

19. (C) Christie stressed his agreement with his Foreign Minister that the best resolution would be an agreement that conferred some "dignity" to Aristide. Christie specifically sympathized with Aristide's complaint that he (Aristide) was being asked to take unconstitutional actions. The Bahamian Prime Minister indicated that based on his conversations with Aristide, he believed that Aristide was not opposed to working with the opposition on the joint appointment of a new Prime Minister and subsequently a new cabinet, but is objecting to being left out of the process or becoming a figurehead for the remainder of his term in office. Christie also made clear his position that President Aristide is Haiti's legitimately elected constitutional leader. But Christie then coupled this principled stand with an evaluation of the state of the Haitian opposition from his position as a practicing politician. "Even with a year to organize," he said, "the opposition will not match Aristide's level of support, and would lose if Aristide decided to run again, which he will not."

110. (C) In this vein, Christie volunteered what he thought might be the outcome of the February 21 talks in Port au Prince, Christie said that he assumed that the United States had the power to achieve a solution. Christie said that he was confident that A/S Noriega "had the clout" to bring Haitian Opposition leader Apaid around, and that once Apaid signed on to an agreement, the rest of the Opposition "would follow" in permitting President Aristide to serve his term out since they couldn't organize themselves to win an election now.

TURNING TO THE U.S. IN EVENT OF AN OUTFLOW FROM HAITI

111. (C) Turning from the crisis in Haiti to the consequences for The Bahamas if that country's political instability results in a migrant outflow, PM Perry Christie went on at great length to reiterate his determination to build a deep water port at Great Inagua that would serve as his country's strategic southern base. As he lamented: "The Haitian problem isn't going to go away for years to come." Given this reality, he was convinced that the Royal Bahamian Defence Force (RBDF) will always need to patrol the country's vast southern waters. Moreover, he continued, the drug problem will always be there, and The Bahamas faces a consistent problem of fish poaching in by neighboring countries. According to Christie, "Last year the Dominican Republic exported \$2 million in conch, and their ain't no conch in Dominican waters!" Clearly, he declared, it is in the best interests of The Bahamas to have a deep water port and refueling station at its southern tip. Christie reiterated the common interests of the United States in having access to a similarly-situated facility and again asked for the Charge's help in obtaining U.S. funding for construction of a harbor and breakwater at Great Inagua.

112. (C) Charge responded that the U.S. would like to support the Bahamian plan, but that it had been extremely difficult to get RBDF and National Security officials to go beyond global declarations and obtain specific plans regarding GCOB intentions on Great Inagua. Given budgetary constraints in the United States, Charge explained that until specific plans were forthcoming, backed up by a GCOB actually committing its own funds, U.S. agencies would be reluctant to even consider blocking off possible funding. Noting that the U.S. was already looking at FY 06 budgets, Charge urged the Prime Minister to accelerate internal GCOB decision-making on Great Inagua. The Prime Minister agreed, indicating that his government is willing to work out the details immediately.

113. (C) In addition to construction of a southern strategic base in Great Inagua, the Prime Minister also revealed that he was in negotiations to conclude an agreement with Royal Caribbean Cruise Line to build a deep water port at Great Inagua. Though the island is currently barren, it is home to more than 50,000 pink flamingos, a huge Morton Salt plant, and at least one nice beach. He was hoping that the flamingo

national park would provide cruise ship passengers with an interesting diversion to the normal Caribbean port of call. Christie took on board Charge's suggestion that costs of constructing a base on Great Inagua could effectively be reduced if any Royal Caribbean construction were to be made part of the GCOB's plans.

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NO ASYLUM
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14. (C) Regarding what The Bahamas would do in the event that large numbers of Haitians started appearing on Bahamian territory, the Prime Minister indicated that he would turn to the United States to effect repatriation. The Bahamas, he said, simply had no capacity to maintain large numbers of migrants for any period of time. Declaring that he had no concert with "those liberals" on this issue, he declared that there would never be asylum in The Bahamas for Haitians. The total population of The Bahamas was, he said, "less than that of a small town in the United States. We simply cannot do what Amnesty International and other groups would insist on us."

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OPERATION COMPASSION HAS A NEW RELEVANCE
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15. (C) Christie was surprisingly well versed on the proposed latest iteration of Operation Compassion, a joint patrolling exercise that involves enhanced communication and coordination between the RBDF and the U.S. Coast Guard. PM Christie reported that the Cabinet had discussed participation in "Op Compassion" the previous day and had approved Bahamian involvement. As the Haitian crisis has evolved, the GCOB has deliberately taken steps in its public comments to publicize an increased RBDF presence in southern Bahamian waters. Charge indicated that we believed that the USCG would be prepared to engage in planning discussions for this iteration of Op Compassion as early as March 3-4.

16. (C) However, as Ref D reports, only four of the eight RBDF vessels capable of long range patrolling are operational. Charge queried the Prime Minister on the return to service date of the HMBS Bahamas noting that effective Bahamian participation in this six-month extended "Op Compassion" required that there be at least three functioning RBDF vessels (the HMBS Bahamas, Nassau, and Yellow Elder) so that one would be on station 24/7 throughout the exercise. Similarly, Charge noted that the logistics of keeping a Bahamian vessel on site 24/7 also presumed that the RBDF vessels would re-fuel and re-provision at Guantanamo Naval Base rather than make extended return trips to its home port of Coral Harbour in New Providence. Finally, Charge noted that we would need assurances of the commitment and cooperation of RBDF Commodore Rolle to commit the necessary assets to the operation. PM Christie responded that the repairs have started and completing them is a government priority. He also acknowledged Commodore Rolle's reluctance to commit the necessary assets by explaining that Rolle claims he needs to keep some ships in reserve in the event of other problems in other areas of the country. The Prime Minister said that he overrode the Commodore's objections by asking him rhetorically, "What other crisis could impact on The Bahamas right now that is more critical than preventing a migrant outflow from Haiti?"

17. (C) Closing this part of the discussion, the Prime Minister also urged the U.S. to simplify matters by providing fuel to RBDF vessels at no cost, as the relative costs are a mere "drop in the bucket" for the U.S. As Charge responded that refueling costs to the GCOB would probably be much lower at Guantanamo than in Nassau, the Prime Minister jokingly accused Charge of "trying to nickel and dime me!" while thanking him for not yet pressuring him for an Article 98 agreement in the meeting.

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COMMENT
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18. (C) The fact that the over-programmed Prime Minister would budget more than one hour for a meeting on one day's notice speaks to the overriding importance Haiti has in local politics. PM Christie is clearly committed to remaining engaged on finding a solution to the Haitian problem, and accepts that this is currently the dominating project of his Foreign Minister, who is also the Minister of Public Service. While his decision-making style may be protracted and indecisive, Bahamian Prime Minister Perry Christie is also an impressive, dynamic, charismatic and ebullient presence and an indefatigable seeker of consensus. For the purpose of promoting peace in Haiti, his personality compliments that of Foreign Minister Mitchell, which is steadier, stealthier, and more methodical. Given The Bahamas' proximity to Haiti, both feel The Bahamas has no choice except engagement.

